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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses three major obstacles to a change in women's status in developing nations: (1) Misconceptions about development. Women are the largest group who suffer as a result of the concept of development as quantitative, material, technological, and elitist, because that conceptualization does not lead to social change. Development based on the satisfaction of elementary existential needs, structural transformations, and the people's active participation is needed. (2) Illusions about education. Existing educational systems distribute education unevenly. Even the educated remain ignorant about social problems. Training is irrelevant to environment. Concerned with the successful, the system loses them in the "brain drain." Fundamental misconceptions are that education equals schooling, is the transmission of knowledge, and teaching is its main element; that teachers have a monopoly on imparting knowledge and skills; and that life is divided into two periods: preparation, and utilization of knowledge. Particularly for women, much more emphasis must be placed on nonformal education, on survival skills, self-reliance and decision making, and on environmentally based, decentralized programs. Seeing learning as lifelong can eliminate educational dogmas. (3) Prejudices against women. Education itself assumes a decisive responsibility for the perpetuation of traditional values and for women's subordinate and dependent role. (Author/AJ)

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MISCONCEPTIONS INFLUENCING NONFORMAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

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Question Series-5

MISCONCEPTIONS INFLUENCING NONFORMAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

Directorate of Nonformal (Adult) Education
Ministry of Education & Social Welfare
New Delhi.
November 1975

NOTE TO THE READER

During the International Women's Year, many million of words have been written and spoken about women's status in society and the imperative need to raise it, both as a compulsion of human justice and as an obligatory part of a society on the move. There has been in some places a consensus that education is the one single instrument to lever woman out of the position she is in. We do not agree with that. There is nothing like a 'one single' instrument ! Only if political, social, economic, cultural, administrative, motivational and educational measures and actions go together and get combined, can some results be achieved.

Needless to say, in such a large context, education plays an important role. Therefore, some basic questions arise : What kind of education will be powerful enough to contribute to the transformation of woman's status ? If past experience is any guide, education more often stabilises the *status quo* rather than uproot it. What deep-lying prejudices and resistances need to be overcome ? Being the largest category of 'under-privileged', socially and economically, woman's status caricatures the socio-economic status of all under-privileged sections of humanity—men and women alike.

This number in the *Question Series* discusses three basic misconceptions, illusions and prejudices without overcoming which nonformal education can have no real meaning for the change in the status of women. Central to the paper is the plea that a transformation of the status of women can come about only through a package approach : of a more relevant interpretation of development, of a more balanced orientation of educational perspectives, and the breaking down of irrational prejudices in respect of the role and function of women in society.

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MISCONCEPTIONS INFLUENCING NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

Many obstacles prevent the expansion of education among women—lack of facilities, lack of resources, lack of faith in the education of girls, lack of motivation etc. But equally negating are three types of misconceptions, illusions and prejudices which hamper progress :

Misconceptions	about	**development**
Illusions	about	**education**
Prejudices	about	**women**

The first two affect men as much as women, but are more aggravated in the case of women.

1 Misconceptions regarding development

For more than thirty years, we have been living with a concept of development which is now proving to be wrong; or at least, its results are far from expectations and promises.

It is a concept which puts emphasis on modern technologies, on transfers of technology, on the mere growth of Gross National Product, on capital formation, on modernisation, on an e itist approach to development.

In reality, it has been predominantly a quantitative theory of development. But all quantitative theories which seek to solve mankind's needs through quantitative growth have failed.

Development limited to growth (even when the growth rate is quite high), without ensuring the redistribution of income brings neither improvement nor real change in the lives of the people, nor the satisfaction of minimum existential needs of the underprivileged. In other words, the removal of poverty cannot be a mechanical result of growth rate.

Development goals have therefore to be modified. This is a pressing need. Let us see two different quotations :

> 'While continuing to talk of the preservation of our ancient cultural values, we have uncritically adopted the model of the consumption-oriented, mass-production-based and highly industrialised western societies. This is a contradiction in terms because the

modern industriali sed society ushers in its own value system which is incompatible with our traditional culture in many ways. There are also grave doubts whether this model itself is viable or whether it is a proper model to be adopted in the material conditions of a poor country like ours.'(J.P. Naik in *The Search for a National System of Education; The Indian Experience*).

'The problem of development must be redefined as a selective attack on the worst forms of proverty. Development goals should be expressed in terms of progressive reduction and eventual elimination of malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, squalor, unemployment, inequalities.' (Mahbul ul Haq).

The argument that new technology will promote economic growth so that the country's gross national product will become larger and thus everybody's slice of the economic cake will get bigger, is often used as an excuse for not cutting that cake in a more equitable manner. The same is true for education : education of the people will never result through a 'percolation' from 'above', from those few who got the privileged share of knowledge and education.

It was long considered that the model of the highly developed and industrialised countries would solve by itself the basic necessities of the world and the existential needs of all mankind in its totality. This assumption has now been proved to be erroneous and misleading. Technological and quantitative remedies are only hard drugs which promise nirvana—but, like all drugs, do not fulfil the promise, but only provoke huge and hidden social costs, as well as psychological damages and disappointments.

Who pays these costs ? It is always the weaker sections of the society—the poor, the oppressed, the down-trodden, the under-privileged, the women.

Women are in reality the largest group which suffers from this type of development. Since quantitative approach to development does not lead to social change, nor decrease income disparities, nor eliminate various privileges and discriminations; it cannot also solve women's problems nor improve their status in society. Women's position in the society is in fact **intimately linked** and correlated to all other disparities, injustices, divisions, and oppressions in society.

If the present status and situation of women (as the most populous social category) reflect the failure of development policies, then women obviously need **another form of development.**

What does **'another'** development mean ? What major modifications should the concept of development undergo to bring it closer to expectations and promises ?

The most persistent factor and one that clamours for remedy is the removal of poverty

and of disparity in income distribution. The following quotation describes how the problem arises in our country and what its magnitude is :

> 'Economic development during the two decades since the inception of planning has resulted in a sizeable increase in average per capita income. There is no doubt that living conditions have improved everywhere, even in the most backward districts. Yet large numbers have remained poor. The twin causes of poverty are underdevelopment and inequality. It is not admissible to ignore or underplay either factor. A large proportion of the population has to go without even the most essential needs of daily life because total national income, and hence aggregate consumption, is too small relatively to the enormous size of the population and, secondly, the distribution of this income and consumption is very uneven. The problem cannot be overcome within the foreseeable future by efforts in one direction only. No rate of growth that can be realistically envisaged could make a major impact on the problem within the foreseeable future if inequality remains as acute as at present. Nor could any feasible egalitarian policies alter the position significantly in the absence of an accelerated rate of growth. Growth and reduction in inequality are both indispensable to a successful attack on mass poverty'. (*Draft Fifth Five Year Plan*, 1974-79. Volume I).

The problem is no different in international perspective as the following quotation from an international study recently submitted to the Special Session of the United Nations Assembly will show :

> 'The same challenge faces Third World and industrialised countries, poor and rich alike: to discover the road to development. All such roads will be based upon the same fundamental values : respect for man, equality, self-reliance, the right to diversity, the promotion of ecologically prudent technologies .. Another development requires transformations of socio-economic and political structures that have long been identified They include such fundamental steps as agrarian reforms, urban reforms, reforms of the commercial and financial circuits, redistribution of wealth and means of production as well as redesigning of political institutions through, *inter alia*, decentralisation with a view to ensuring the democratisation of the political and economic decision-making power, promoting self-management and curbing the grip of bureaucracies.'
> (From : *What Now? Another Development*, published by Dag Hamarskjold Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden).

Therefore, **'another'** development that we are looking for should be : (1) geared to the satisfaction of elementary existential needs; (2) endogeneous and self-reliant; (3) in harmony with the environment ; (4) based on structural transformations and active participation of the people. There is a growing concern, both here and elsewhere, about non-achievements arising out of ill-conceived developmental approaches and an equally growing consensus about the basic recommendation needed for the future.

Therefore, **the removal of prejudices and misconceptions regarding development is one of the primordial necessities**—both for immediate action, and for long-term goals, and **women have a direct concern** in this process.

2 Illusions regarding education

We have lived equally long with some basic illusions and myths, misconceptions and prejudices regarding education; and equally, they are proving to be wrong.

In spite of all commendable results achieved in education all around the world and in our country more particularly, it cannot be denied, as stated on several occasions and in documents here and abroad, that the existing educational systems have certain inherent drawbacks :

(1) They leave a large portion of the population without any education, which means that the distribution of knowledge is uneven.

(2) The problem is much more than a mere quantitative inadequacy ; the rigid educational pattern is not in a position to reach all sections of the society and all categories of men and women. Real democratisation of education is hardly possible through conventional models. Under-privileged groups, working children, poor boys and girls, young people from under-privileged classes are in reality excluded from educational facilities. Even those who do receive some education, get an irrelevant and often unrelated knowledge, with the corollary of being largely incapable of taking active, critical participation in development.

(3) What is worse, they produce young people whose incomplete and ill-conceived education only alienates them from their own people, since even by becoming literate or *educated*, they rarely acquire an awareness of the problems of the society in which they live or of the means to play a real part in their solution.

(4) The educational systems are at variance with the environment in the sense that for growing numbers, an inadequate environment either does not provide employment or does not create readiness for self-employment, or creates a continuing struggle as in the rural environment; in short, here again, as in the case of development, there is a contradiction between the environment and education.

(5) The system seems more concerned with those who 'succeed', to be siphoned off as portion of the 'brain drain'.

All these drawbacks reflect certain fundamental misconceptions about education. Most particularly :

1 that education equals schooling

2 that education is transmission of knowledge

3 that life is divided into two periods : preparation for life, and utilisation of knowledge for living and working

4 that teaching is the main element in education and that teachers have the monopoly of imparting knowledge and skills

A consideration of all these negative aspects both on the developmental and educational side, leads us to search for solutions in the following directions :

(a) If equality in distribution and elimination of inequities are priority concerns for present-day societies—there must be an awareness that three types of disparities are inter-linked: disparities in the distribution of wealth, power and knowledge. To achieve a more equitable knowledge distribution and sharing of learning opportunities, the dependence solely on school facilities and on the formal educational system cannot suffice. Much more emphasis must be placed on non-formal ways of education and on the role that incidental (informal) learning plays and can play in the life of citizens, particularly those still excluded from the benefits of formal schooling. Women should be particularly supported and encouraged to utilise non-formal educational opportunities. However, mere educational measures are not sufficient: other socio-economic changes are necessary to support the expansion of non-formal learning facilities and programmes. It would be appropriate to recall a warning from a recent publication on Non-formal Education.

> 'It is silly to suppose that non-formal education can compete with a formal system if the latter is the wellspring of status and income.....The tyranny of the formal school is buttressed more strongly by its status as the exclusive avenue for social and economic advancement than by anything else' (Marvin Grandstaff in *Non-formal Education and an Expanded Conception of Development).*

(b) If emphasis in development strategies should be shifted more than in the past on humanitarian and survival needs—then emphasis in education should be on programmes and approaches geared to the deprived sections of the society and on contents which are directly relevant to survival to fight against poverty and to action that will change the environmental conditions and constraints. Since development is a comprehensive and multi-sided phenomenon, and not merely growth, educational components will have to be integrated into development schemes. This will facilitate the linkage between work and education and permit a socio-education amalgam. Even literacy programmes have to be transformed in order to get a broader base; mere literacy does not satisfy either individual aspirations or society's needs. The following quotation seems pertinent and the answer adequate as well:

> 'What would happen if the whole world became literate ? Answer: not so very much, for the world is by and large structured in such a way that it is capable of absorbing the impact. But if the whole world consisted of literate, autonomous, critical, constructive people, capable of translating ideas into action, individually or collectively - the world would change .. In reality quite a lot would happen, in fact--if we dare define it broadly enough and take the consequence of trusting the people who are given, and themselves develop further, the tools of reading and writing.' (John Galtung in the document presened at the International Symposium for Literacy in Persepolis, September 1975)

(c) If the trends become more and more directed towards the 'ecodevelopment approach' in achieving socio-economic objectives—education must also be gradually decentralised, diversified, ecologically and environmentally based. **Non-formal education has, in that light, evident advantages** compared to more rigid educational modalities. Along with

changes and improvements in formal education, non-formal education and non-conventional ways of imparting knowledge and skills, as well as of creating facilities for learning will get a growing importance. For many girls and women non-formal ways of education, being more flexible and less binding, more open-ended and less sequential, offer a new chance in life.

(d) **The trend towards self-reliance and people's participation in decision-making**—meaning implicitly more autonomy for communities and individuals, has to be reflected both in content and methods of education. Generally speaking, educational patterns do not comply with the needs of communities for self-reliance and of people for autonomous behaviour and active participation in public affairs. Educational methods are not sufficiently geared to create self-awareness; or awareness about the surrounding realities; self-confidence and ability for problem-solving; independent and critical thinking. There is too much uniformity and conformity in teaching practices and too little discovery of truth, dialogue or promotion of creativity. Both for children and adults, both in formal and non-formal practices, the predominant situation in the classroom may be described in the following way :

(a) 'the teacher teaches and the students are taught;

(b) the teachers knows everything and the students know nothing;

(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;

(d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;

(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;

(f) the teacher chooses and enforces choice, and the students comply;

(g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting, through the action of the teacher;

(h) the teacher chooses the programme content, and the students adapt to it ;

(i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;

(j) the teacher is 'the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects'.
(Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*).

(e) **If the basic dogmas and misconceptions about education have to be eliminated**—learning has to become *life-long* and *life-wide*. Some 'see' in this trend a danger of transforming life to an 'obligatory, compulsory, interminable schooling process'; but in reality what is visualised is a situation in which people will be in a position to learn what they want, when they want, where they want, and in the way it suits them. The concept of *life-long* and *life-wide* education brings much more freedom to individuals regarding their learning facilities. Therefore, educational development does not mean super-imposing some new programmes (of non-formal education, adult education, women's education, family life

education, extension education etc.) on the top of old ones (school programmes, collegiate education, conventional literacy programmes etc.). Instead of juxtaposing various educational schemes, we have to envisage creation of **comprehensive learning environments.**

It is in that light that non-formal education—for everybody, for men and women, but more particularly for women—can gain appropriate place, not as a second rate substitute for second rate learners and citizens, but as an indispensable alternative for expanding learning facilities for the society as a whole.

3 Prejudices regarding women

Women's education is affected by yet another set of prejudices and misconceptions—those related to their own **status** and **situation,** their role and functions in the society and the family.

Society, here and elsewhere, is still largely man-made, reflecting in its various manifestations the male world, its vested interests, man's discriminatory power, dominance and aggression. In spite of considerable progress achieved in women's status and in society's attitudes regarding women, traditional and conventional habits die hard. The value system still favours man's position in society, and undermines the role and place of women.

Although women play an important role in agricultural production, their position in rural areas is subordinated. With the development of the farming process and its modernisation, man acquires a better status—for which he gets educated and trained—while women remain with unskilled and second-rate jobs and duties. Modernisation of agriculture and the introduction of high yielding varieties hardly help women either in facilitating their work or in raising their contribution to family income.

Similar trends are seen in urban areas as well. Women's participation is limited to lower-grade tasks and social activities.

This is reflected in the expectations which the society and family place on women's contribution. They are still not expected to be socially useful, active in civic affairs, or community-minded. Their roles and expectations are limited mainly to the area of family upbringing, sex life, home and childcare, and the like. Girls are prepared to get married, young women to bear and rear children, older women to be 'the pillars' of family cells. That is the pattern of life that is in store for most of them.

This does not however mean that women are therefore not respected. On the contrary, and paradoxically enough, respectability and discrimination are not mutually exclusive; veneration of women is not incompatible with this second-rate position; the dominant mother's role in the home often hides their subordinate role in the society.....

All these and many other prejudices are deeply rooted in our tradition, as well as in the present-day political and economic institutions, social structures, employment constraints, poverty limitations, vested interests, inequalities in wealth and power distribution, etc. As long

as these obstacles are not removed or at least not shaken up, there is only a limited chance of breaking down dominant prejudices and misconceptions.

On the other hand, such prejudices are perpetuated by transmission of convictions and misapprehensions, by education and mis-education, by wrong assumptions and erroneous beliefs, by inculcation of outmoded code of conduct or mores. Education itself assumes a decisive responsibility for the perpetuation of traditional values and for the subordinate and dependent role of women as a natural order of society.

As the Report on the *Status of Women in India* has stated :

> 'The deep foundations of the inequality of the sexes are built in the minds of men and women through a socialisation process which continues to be extremely powerful. Right from their earliest years, boys and girls are brought up to know that they are different from each other and this differentiation is strengthened in every way possible—through language forms, modes of behaviour, of labour etc. They begin to learn very early what is proper or not proper for boys and girls and all attempts at deviation are noticed, discouraged and sometimes punished. The sissy and the tomboy are equal objects of derision. There is nothing wrong in this if it were merely a question of distinction. But it soon gets inextricably tied up with the traditional concepts of the roles of men and women and their mutual relationships which are based on inequality'. (*Towards Equality*—Published by the Government of India, Department of Social Welfare, December 1974).

This is why : (a) present-day education, particularly formal education, is strengthening traditional prejudices regarding women through content and form; (b) educational opportunities are unevenly utilised by boys and girls, men and women, making a large portion of education unsuitable and unattractive for women (c) many educational programmes, especially the non-formal ones, unconsciously emphasise the unequal status of women by perpetuating the classification of a curriculum on the basis of sex.

There are still opinions that women themselves, their under-development, the backwardness of their intellectual life, their docility and lack of interest, their passivity and alienation are themselves 'guilty' and 'responsible' for this state of affairs. It may be said that these opinions are not uncommon either among men or among women. Nevertheless, what was stated for oppressed, alienated people in general is particularly valid for women : 'What alienation was defined as the **intrinsic inferiority** of the popular masses, is now objectively recognized to be the **result** of **alienation itself,** which is discovered as the manifestation of a situation of domination.'

The problem of women's education—linked with, interrelated to, and conditioned by all these prejudices—is, therefore, an inseparable component of fundamental, general and deep-rooted socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural aspirations, needs and trends.

The Directorate of Non-formal (Adult) Education is the academic and technical wing of the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare in respect of matters relating to non-formal youth and adult education at the all-India level. It assists in the formulation, implementation, coordination and evaluation of programmes initiated by the Government of India.

The main functions of the Directorate are :

- Training and orientation
- Production of learning materials
- Surveys and studies
- Documentation and clearing house functions
- Experimentation and innovation
- Promotional activities
- Consultative and advisory services
- Forum for pooling of experiences and exchange of ideas

The major on-going programmes are :

* Farmers' Functional Literacy Programme
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